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SPEECH BY DR TONY TAN KING YAM, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE
FOR EDUCATION, AT THE NATIONAL POLICE CADET CORPS
20TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER HELD AT THE SILVER STAR THEATRE RESTAURANT
ON FRIDAY, 16 NOVEMBER 1979 AT 7.30 PM

ECA IN SCHOOLS

First of all let me say how pleased my wife and I are to be here this evening to join with you in celebrating your 20th anniversary. You have much to be proud about and the dinner tonight is a suitable and appropriate culmination of yet another year of varied activities by the National Police Cadet Corps.

Uniformed groups, of which the NPCC is one, play a significant role in helping to provide an all-round education for our youth. They are part of our schools' Extra Curricular Activities (ECA). ECA programmes are structured to provide meaningful participation for our children so that their school experience may be broadened and enriched.

Participation by pupils in ECA has always been encouraged by the Ministry of Education and ECA have become an integral part of the school programme. In primary schools ECA are voluntary in nature and are normally confined to pupils from Primary Four upwards. ECA participation is mandatory in secondary schools.

As you all know ECA are not new in schools. Indeed, they have a long history. As far back as 1964 the Ministry was already concerned about participation by pupils in ECA. Slow progress was made in the early years and this was attributed to a lack of proper planning and organisation of ECA in schools. The Ministry therefore drew up ECA guidelines and set up a system of incentives to encourage participation and to make parents aware of the importance of ECA in their children's school career.

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This eventually led in 1967 to the award of marks or grades for ECA which are entered into pupils' report books in secondary schools and can be taken into account for entry into Pro-U I classes and application for bursaries and scholarships.

In 1970 the Ministry revised its scheme to include a broader range of activities. Music and musical activities were given greater prominence and participation in activities at the national level, such as National Day and Singapore Youth Festival was also catered for. One major reason for the revision was to ensure that every able-bodied child participated in at least one ECA and that there was no over participation. Attempts were made to see that the marks awarded for different kinds of activities were commensurate with the effort put in and that there was continuous participation in ECA during a student's secondary school career.

For grading purposes ECA are classified under three broad groups - sports and games, uniformed groups and societies and clubs. To check over-participation no pupil may participate in more than two groups, one of them being sports and games. Children who are unable to participate in sports and games because of illness or handicaps may participate in the other two groups with the approval of the Principal.

Some weaknesses and desirable improvements were spotted during the 1970s and the ECA grading scheme was further revised in 1976. The present scheme, which now operates in schools, became operational in 1977 for Secondary One pupils. ECA therefore cannot be an unalterable set programme of activities but have to be amended from time to time to meet new requirements.

Notwithstanding some shortcomings the aim of mass participation in ECA has been achieved to a large extent. Out of a total secondary school population in 1978 of some 170,000, 95,000 or 56 per cent of the pupils took part in at least one sport or game. 58,000 or 34 per cent joined one of the uniformed groups, 19,000 or 11 per cent were active in music activities while clubs and societies attracted 109,000 or 64 per cent of the pupils.

The need for mass participation in sports and games by all our pupils has always been recognised. Attainment of physical fitness must be one of the prime objectives of ECA. This is even more necessary today when more and more of our pupils are living in high-rise flats. Class and house participation are stressed because the majority of pupils are not likely to be able to participate at school or national level.

ECA constitute a healthy way for pupils of the various ethnic groups to integrate through organised activities like sports, uniformed group training, music sessions and school society meetings. One cannot over emphasise the importance of living in harmony in our multi-racial society and ECA provides the atmosphere and opportunity for our pupils to learn to live and play together.

ECA are also useful in fostering a sense of self and group discipline. Participation in group activities or team games inculcates in our pupils the spirit of loyalty to the team. By taking part, every member of the team learns the value of team work and co-operation. Camaraderie is nurtured and leadership can be developed.

This last aspect is especially well catered for in uniformed groups and it is heartening to note that there is healthy participation by pupils in the uniformed groups. Of the 58,000 secondary school students involved in uniformed groups in 1978, 20,000 joined the National Cadet Corps and 17,500 the National Police Cadet Corps. There were 5,000 scouts and 4,000 girl-guides. 4,000 joined the Red Cross Society, 6,000 the St. John Ambulance Brigade while the number of members of the Boys and Girls Brigades were 500 and 1,000 respectively. The two Cadet Corps therefore have the largest number of participants among the uniformed groups.

It is the intention of the Ministry to make the cadet movement accessible to as many pupils as possible. However one constraint is the shortage of cadet officers, both for the NCC and the NPCC. The low intake of male teachers into the education service aggravates the difficulty of recruiting new cadet officers. Serving officers have little opportunity to be released and the general impression is that once a teacher joins

a cadet movement it becomes a life-long commitment. It is not surprising that for lady teachers this is a frightening prospect.

In this connection I would like to pay a tribute to your officers who have sacrificed much of their time and effort in serving in the NPCC in schools. Last year 328 of your officers were awarded the NPCC Service Medal and 22 officers the NPCC Long Service Medal in recognition of their contribution to the NPCC. This year 130 officers received the NPCC Service Medal and 56 officers the NPCC Long Service Medal. These figures speak well for the NPCC and for the officers who have served with dedication and measured up to exacting standards of both performance and personal conduct.

What are some of the problems in ECA that have surfaced in the course of implementation? Some schools have perhaps taken on more activities than they can cope with resulting in ineffective programmes on account of lack of expertise, manpower and facilities. The major problem, however, continues to be excessive stress on the winning of competitions. This may be due to students trying to earn marks or schools hoping to project their image. The unfortunate result is over-participation in ECA by some pupils to the detriment of their academic work. For example, the attention and heat generated each year by the school bands competitions is symptomatic of this undesirable stress although, in terms of pupil participation, less than 8,000 pupils or 4.5 per cent of the secondary school population were involved in such functions in 1978.

It is pertinent for us to remember that the primary purpose for a child going to school is to learn the three Rs, ie Reading, Writing and Arithmetic and the purpose of ECA is to complement such study - not to turn every child into a champion or to glorify self-achievement. Rather ECA should aim at developing healthy children and attitudes of group cohesiveness and loyalty. The last thing that we want is to load on more stress on children by over-emphasis on competition.

We will have to make further adjustments before we can arrive at the correct formula for ECA in schools and we might usefully learn from the experience of other countries. For example, I am told that, in some American high schools achievement in sports

is so highly regarded that every able-bodied child nurses the ambition to be a football or baseball star and thereby earn public acclaim and great respect in the eyes of his peers and of his school. The other extreme can be found in some European countries where schooling is rigorously academic and entry to prestigious universities is by way of examinations which are completely academic in nature. Students are ranked in order of their examination results and entry determined accordingly. ECA, interviews and character references are studiously avoided.

We are neither Americans nor Europeans and we must find our own level. In our ECA programme we should seek to arrive at the very best blend of healthy exercise, fostering of group loyalty and encouragement of excellence. Like all educational objectives, the aims are easy to state but difficult to achieve. Nevertheless we must keep on trying and in due course, I am sure that our efforts will not be in vain.

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